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ABSTRACT

In analyzing various moral and legal philosophies, two perspectives emerge, absolute moral rules/higher law, and situationally-specific moral rules/legal positivism. From these two perspectives, four types of individuals emerge in accordance with their degree of adherence to ideological tenets: (1) situationists (high on idealism and relativism); (2) subjectivists (low on idealism, high on relativism); (3) absolutists (high on idealism, low on relativism); and (4) exceptionists (low on idealism and relativism). The Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ), a 9-point Likert-type instrument, was developed to identify ordinary people according to one of the four categories. Subsequently, subjects representing the four ethical types were participants in various research studies judging contemporary issues, moral vignettes, classical psychological experiments, responses to accusations regarding a possible lie, and moral behavior. Across all studies, absolutists were concerned with rigid adherence to traditional moral guidelines; exceptionists, though concerned with moral rules, conceived of circumstances whereby these rules might be suspended. Situationists made moral evaluations with the situation as their central focus. Subjectivists allowed personal values and concerns to affect their moral evaluations. The Ethics Position Questionnaire is appended. (BL)

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Ethical perspectives, reactions to other's moral behavior, and consequent moral action

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Making moral or ethical judgments of our fellow humans and their actions is probably a unique feature of social interaction. One might assume that social interaction is very much affected by the constant evaluations we make of other people and their behavior. Moral and ethical judgments are frequently made in response to infractions of the rules and norms of society. Sociologist employ the term "more" to describe social norms that reference the moral standards of a given society (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969). These moral standards which are utilized as guidelines in making judgments of an ethical or moral nature produce a set of proscriptive and prescriptive rules which govern social interaction (e.g., do not lie, cheat, or steal vs. do help others in trouble, do one's duty, or keep promises). Religious ideology and moral philosophy contributes to and impacts these moral standards but, the larger moral standards of society are the focus of this discussion. More explicitly, the focus here is the day-to-day judgments made by ordinary people in contrast to moral judgments made by theologians and moral philosophers.

Numerous psychological and sociological factors might be hypothesized to play important roles in the moral evaluation of another person however, a more exhaustive analysis might best proceed by consideration of a typical situation in which moral evaluation occurs. Person A whom we will designate as the observer, interacts with person B whom we will designate as the actor. During the course of some specified social interaction person A observes person B violate a norm or rule of the type discussed above. Person A's evaluation of person B's behavior and person A's evaluation of person B as an individual could be determined by a variety of factors. First, unique and stable characteristics of person A may be critical in influencing person A's

moral evaluation of person B and his or her behavior. Potential individual differences in persons who make moral judgments can result in differential moral judgments of the same individuals and their behavior (Forsyth, 1978; 1980; 1981; Hogan, 1973; Forsyth & Pope, 1983). The focus of this discussion will be on the degree to which these individual differences do effect moral evaluations. This is not to suggest that other variables are less important in determining moral judgments but, instead to illuminate the existing knowledge regarding individual differences.

Variations in Philosophical Systems

Philosophers who specialize in ethics or the study of morals, have long maintained that there are many possible approaches to making judgments of morality. Frankena (1963) has effectively synthesized some of the varied approaches of moral philosophy into a logical outline. Frankena divided most moral philosophies into two broad categories: deontological and teleological. First, deontological theories are based on the premise that natural, universal principles or morality exist and that these should be followed absolutely under all circumstances. The teleological theories make up the remainder of moral philosophies. According to the teleological approach, the final amount of non-moral positive consequences produced by any action must be taken into account in judging the morality of an action.

If a careful analysis of the various moral philosophies were undertaken, two related and central issues would emerge. The first is the degree to which absolute moral rules should dictate an individual's actions and the second is the degree to which consequences or outcomes of actions should govern moral evaluations independently of universal moral rules.

This dual perspective is also found in legal philosophy in the contrasting views of legal positivism and the notion of higher natural law. Legal positivism takes the approach that Laws are justified on the basis of the common good for all of society whereas the opposite natural law approach is based on the idea that natural laws exist which can be discovered through reason. These natural laws are inherently good and should be used to govern society.

The purpose of this discussion is not to review the writings of moral or legal philosophers but, rather to examine the possibility that ordinary people (not just philosophers) vary in the degree to which they endorse absolute moral rules and allow outcomes to mitigate their moral evaluation.

Individual Differences in Ethical Ideology

Forsyth (1980) hypothesized that individuals possess personal ethical systems. Forsyth further suggested that individuals' ethical ideologies differ along two basic dimensions. Forsyth's two basic dimensions closely reflect the two basic issues mentioned previously in the discussion of moral philosophy.

The first dimension is the degree to which an individual rejects universal moral principles in favor of moral appraisals based on more relative types of judgments. More explicitly, this dimension suggests that some individuals seem to deny the possibility of formulating or using universal moral principles in making moral judgments. Therefore, these individuals are more relativistic in their judgments of moral issues. In contrast, other individuals feel that morally absolute rules do exist and should be called upon when making moral judgments. These persons employ moral absolutes as

guidelines in making judgments of moral issues. Obviously, most people would fall somewhere between these two extremes. Forsyth labelled this dimension relativism and postulated that individuals would vary considerably along this continuous dimension.

Relativism is conceptually very similar to Hogan's (1973) concept of the ethics of conscience versus the ethics of responsibility. Hogan considered the ethics of conscience versus the ethics of responsibility to be one of five important dimensions of moral conduct and character. Hogan developed an instrument, the Survey of Ethical Attitudes (SEA: 1970) to assess this dimension. Individuals endorsing the ethics of responsibility would be considered to be highly relativistic whereas individuals endorsing the ethics of conscience would be more likely to be nonrelativistic.

Forsyth's second basic dimension is purported to be the degree of idealism which an individual possesses. Idealism is defined as the extent to which individuals believe that desirable consequences can be obtained by following "correct" moral actions. An individual who is highly idealistic will believe that mostly favorable outcomes will result from following "correct" moral action. In contrast, a low or non-idealistic individual will see that the possibility exists for a mix of both positive and negative consequences stemming from "correct" moral behavior. As with relativism, it is postulated that individuals would vary along this continuous dimension.

Insert Table I

Forsyth hypothesized that these two dimensions are independent and that they do not correlate with one another. By crossing these two dimensions in a 2 x 2 design and by examining the extremes of these two dimensions, four very distinct ethical types emerge: Situationists (high on relativism and

idealism), absolutists (low on relativism but high on idealism), subjectivists (high on relativism but low on idealism), and exceptionists (low on relativism and idealism). Those individuals high on relativism (situationists and subjectivists) are critical of specific moral principles and feel situations must be examined prior to making moral decisions. Individuals low on relativism (absolutists and exceptionists) make judgments with universal moral principles in mind and consider moral principles to be more important than situational factors.

Persons high on idealism (situationists and absolutists) view positive outcomes as arising from behavior if, as in the case of the situationist, the individual understands and correctly analyzes the situation and consequently makes a reasonable decision or, in the case of the absolutist, simply follows morally involate rules. In contrast, individuals low on idealism (subjectivists and exceptionists) see mixed outcomes resulting from actions, whether they are moral or immoral. The subjectivists who reject universal moral rules, appraise situations on the basis of personal values without idealistic notions about the outcomes of moral or immoral behavior. The exceptionists endorse universal moral principles as guides for behavior but, are open to exceptions because of the various outcomes or consequences an action may produce.

Insert Table 2

Forsyth (1978; 1980) developed a questionnaire, the Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) to assess these two hypothesized dimensions of ethical ideology. Idealism and relativism are measured by means of two subscales contained with the instrument. A series of studies (Forsyth, 1978; 1980;

1981; Forsyth & Berger, 1982; Forsyth & Pope, 1983; Pope, 1981) have demonstrated that individual differences in ethical ideology as measured by the EPQ, have an impact on moral judgments.

The Ethics Position Questionnaire

The EPQ is made up of a series of 20 attitude statements, of which the first 10 items assess idealism and the second 10 items assess relativism. Subjects are asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a 9-point Likert-type format. To score the EPQ, the mean rating of the first 10 items constitutes the idealism score and the mean rating of the second 10 items constitutes the relativism score. Thus, administration of the EPQ results in two scores, one for idealism and one for relativism.

Insert Table 3

Low scores on both subscales are those persons falling one standard deviation both the sample mean and high scores on both subscales are those persons falling one standard deviation above the sample mean. Referring back to Table 2, subjects with high scores on both scales are situationists, and subjects with low scores on both scales are exceptionists. Those subjects high on idealism and low on relativism are absolutists and those subjects low on idealism and high on relativism are subjectivists. Individuals falling near the mean on either of the scales remain unclassified by the EPQ. Forsyth (1980) reported sample means of 6.35 (SD = 1.17) for idealism and a mean of 6.18 (SD = 1.13) for relativism based on a sample (n = 241) of college students. Pope (1981) reported similar sample statistics (Idealism (M = 6.4, SD = 1.1) Relativism (M = 6.1, SD = 1.2) based on a sample (n = 265) of college students). Forsyth (1980) presents substantial reli-

ability data including both internal consistency measures and temporal stability measures. Forsyth (1980) also presents confirming predictive validity and discriminant validity. Given that the psychometric properties of the EPQ are sound, what kinds of confirming evidence exists regarding the constructs developed by Forsyth?

Research on Individual Differences Employing the EPQ

Forsyth (1980) measured the attitudes of the different ethical ideologies on several contemporary moral issues (test-tube babies, mercy killing, marijuana use, homosexuality, and abortion). His results suggested that absolutists were the most conservative across all issues and that situationists tended to be the liberal across all issues. Forsyth did obtain a gender effect with males being more extreme in their attitudes. It is possible that the gender effect was related to the specific content of the issues assessed.

In a very complex study, Forsyth (1978) found differences in the different ethical types when they were asked to judge an actor who either: 1) was consistent or inconsistent with a moral norm, 2) outcome quality was good or bad, 3) outcome magnitude was high or low. To summarize, absolutists were the most condemning and harsh in their evaluations. Absolutists strongly condemned the actor even when the moral violation resulted in positive outcomes. The more relativistic judges (situationists and subjectivists) tempered their moral judgments by considering the outcome of the event. Differences between the differing ethical ideologies were found across outcome quality and magnitude however, most of the differences reflect differences between absolutists and the other three groups (Forsyth, 1978).

Forsyth (1981) by manipulating perceived level of responsibility for an event and outcome quality, produced differences in moral judgments of an

actor across eithical ideologies. Absolutists when compared to exceptionists judged the actor as being less moral whenever negative outcomes were produced. Situationists and subjectivists produced more moderate evaluations of morality. As level of responsibility increased moral evaluations became more extreme.

Forsyth and Pope (1983) had individuals from each of the ethical ideology categories evaluate short descriptions of several "classic" experiments in psychology. All of the studies employed human participants and several of the studies involved deception or some other ethically disputed practices. The ethical judges were asked to judge the ethical similarity or dissimilarity all studies in a series of paired-comparison tasks. Ethical judges also evaluated the research in a series of questionnaires.

The data were analyzed by multidimensional scaling and three key scaling factors were derived from the MDS analysis which were common to all ethical types. However, the different ethical ideologies varied in the degree to which they employed judgment dimensions in their evaluations of the various studies. Situationists emphasized risks relative to benefits, and the potential for subject harm. Absolutists based their judgments on costs created for the participating subjects and the riskiness of the procedures. Subjectivists' judgments were associated with the harmfulness, legitimacy, and the invasiveness of the procedure. Exceptionists emphasized the consequentiality of the research, as well as scientific legitimacy, magnitude of costs, and the use of deception. Overall, low relativism subjects (absolutists and exceptionists) saw research as being less ethical than did the highly relativistic subjects (situationists and subjectivists).

Pope (1981) had individuals from the different ethical ideologies perform moral evaluations of persons' responses to accusations regarding a possible lie. The ethical judges evaluated the actors' written remarks which were categorized into four types of accounting tactics. That is, some actors accounted for the possible lie by: 1) denial, 2) excuses, 3) justifications, and 4) apologies. There were eight accounts in each category resulting a total of 32 accounts. All four ethical types evaluated all four account types by means of paired-comparison procedure and the resulting data were analyzed by multidimensional scaling. Ethical judges also evaluated the accounts on more traditional Likert-type scales.

Pope (1981) found underlying scaling factors which were common to all four ethical ideologies however, these scaling factors were weighted differently by the different ethical judges. For example, one common underlying dimension was responsibility but it was employed differently by the four ethical types. Unfortunately, analysis of variance performed on the supplemental ratings did demonstrate group differences. However, the differences in evaluations based on different accounts were quite large. Because lies are universally condemned and because account differences were substantial the individual differences may have been obscured by the situational factors.

Forsyth and Berger (1982) investigated the relationship between ethical ideology and moral behavior. Students were tempted to cheat on an experimental laboratory examination. Overall, subjects from the four different ethical ideologies behaved in a similar fashion. Nonetheless, post-experiment questionnaire ratings revealed that self-devaluation was highest among absolutists and the exceptionists felt more happy as they cheated more. Nonrelativist ethical types (situationists and subjectivists) were less clear except that subjectivists indicated concern over being detected in their cheating.

Summary of Research

It is perhaps apparent that situational factors are very important in the determination of moral evaluations. Nonetheless, the previous research does suggest that there are important individual differences which affect moral evaluations of other persons and these differences are accurately assessed via the consideration of Forsyth's (1978) dimensions: relativism and idealism. Although ethical ideology has not had a direct impact on behavior, it does appear to influence moral judgments of other persons' actions.

Consistent differences in the ethical types have emerged across studies. Absolutists (low relativism and high idealism) are very concerned with rigid adherance to traditional moral guidelines and exceptionists (low relativism and low idealism) although equally concerned about traditional moral rules do conceive of circumstances whereby these rules must be suspended because of adverse outcomes. Situationists (high relativism and idealism) often analyze circumstances surrounding events and make moral evaluations with the situation as their central focus. Lastly, subjectivists (high relativism and low idealism) are similar to situationists except that they often allow personal values and concerns to effect their moral evaluations.

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Table 1

The Major Dimensions Underlying Ethical Judgments

Relativism

High----------Low

rejection of universal rules in favor of relative judgments; denies moral absolutes	acceptance of universal moral rules; employs moral absolutes when making moral decisions

Idealism

High----------Low

Desirable consequences always stem from "correct" moral acts; undesirable outcomes can be avoided by correct moral action	undesirable consequences will be sometimes mixed with desirable outcomes; following "correct" moral actions does not ensure good outcomes

Note. Both dimensions are assumed to be independent and not correlated. Persons may vary along both dimensions independently and both dimensions are assumed to be continuous.

Table 2

Taxonomy of Ethical Ideologies

Idealism	Relativism: High	Relativism: Low
High	Situationists Rejects moral rules; advocates individualistic analysis of each act in each situation; relativistic.	Absolutists Assumes that the best possible outcome can always be achieved by following universal moral rules.
Low	Subjectivists Appraisals based on personal values and perspective rather than universal moral principles; relativistic.	Exceptionists Moral absolutes guide judgments but pragmatically open to exceptions to these standards; utilitarian.

(Adapted from Forsyth, 1980)

Table 3

The Ethics Position Questionnaire

Instructions: You will find a series of general statements listed below. Each represents a commonly held opinion and there are no right or wrong answers. You will probably disagree with some items and agree with others. We are interested in the extent to which you agree or disagree with such matters of opinion.

Please read each statement carefully. Then indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by placing in front of the statement the number corresponding to your feelings, where:

1 = Completely disagree	4 = Slightly disagree	7 = Moderately agree
2 = Largely disagree	5 = Neither agree nor disagree	8 = Largely agree
3 = Moderately disagree	6 = Slightly agree	9 = Completely agree

_____1. A person should make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another even to a small degree.

_____2. Risks to another should never be tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be.

_____3. The existence of potential harm to others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained.

_____4. One should never psychologically or physically harm another person.

_____5. One should not perform an action which might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual.

_____6. If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done.

_____7. Deciding whether or not to perform an act by balancing the positive consequences of the act against the negative consequences of the act is immoral.

_____8. The dignity and welfare of people should be the most important concern in any society.

_____9. It is never necessary to sacrifice the welfare of others.

____10. Moral actions are those which closely match ideals of the most "perfect" action.

Table 3 - cont'd

____11. There are no ethical principles that are so important that they should be a part of any code of ethics.

____12. What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another.

____13. Moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another.

____14. Different types of moralitics cannot be compared as to "rightness."

____15. Questions of what is ethical for everyone can never be resolved since what is moral or immoral is up to the individual.

____16. Moral standards are simply personal rules which indicate how a person should behave, and are not to be applied in making judgments of others.

____17. Ethical considerations in interpersonal relations are so complex that individuals should be allowed to formulate their own individual codes.

____18. Rigidly codifying an ethical position that prevents certain types of actions could stand in the way of better human relations and adjustment.

____19. No rule concerning lying can be formultated; whether a lie is permissible or not permissible totally depends upon the situation.

____20. Whether a lie is judged to be moral or immoral depends upon the circumstances surrounding the action.